

OUR COAST GUARD

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES
REVENUE MARINE SERVICE



BY LIEUTENANT WORTH G. ROSS, U.S.R.M.

Harper's new monthly magazine
Volume 73, Issue 438, November 1886

blank for printing double sided

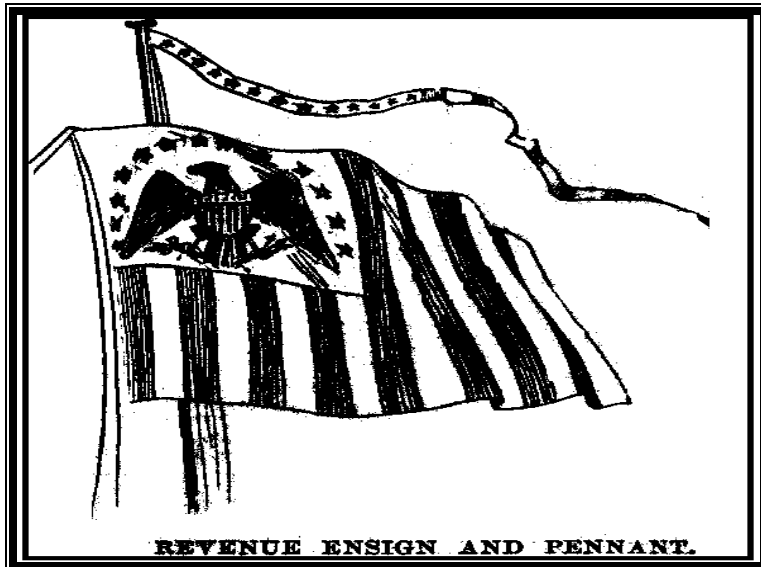
OUR COAST GUARD

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES REVENUE MARINE SERVICE.

BY

LIEUTENANT WORTH G. ROSS, U.S.R.M.

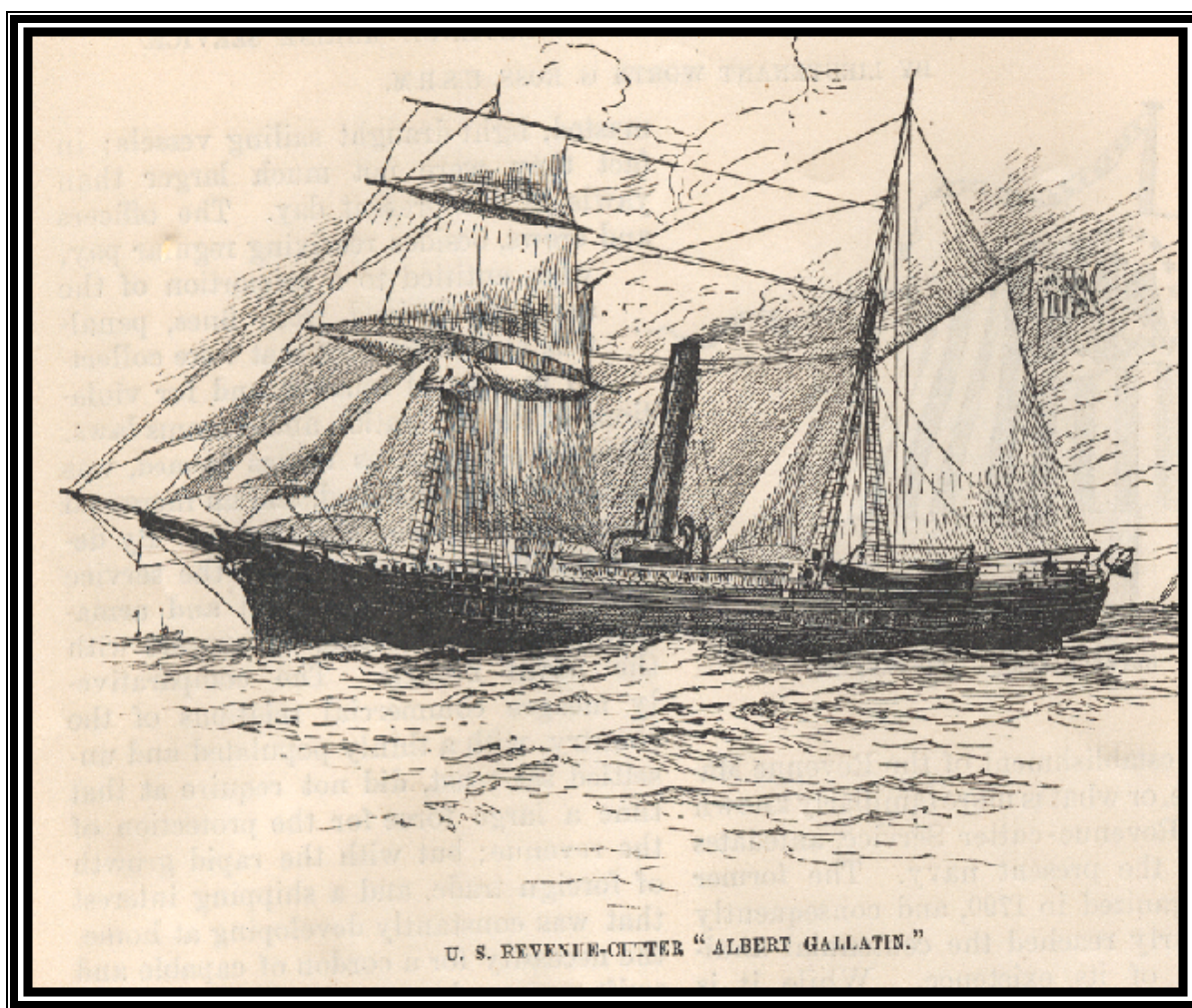
THE establishment of the Revenue Marine, or what is more familiarly known as the Revenue Cutter Service, antedates that of the present navy. The former was organized in 1790, and consequently has nearly reached the centennial anniversary of its existence. While it is known that such a corps is a part of the government machinery, there is little understanding by the public generally regarding its scope and character and the magnitude of its varied duties.



REVENUE ENSIGN AND PENNANT.

That matchless organizer and master of details, Alexander Hamilton, first Secretary of the Treasury, as early as 1789, recommended the employment of boats for the security of the revenue against contraband, and in a bill which he afterward presented to Congress submitted a proposition for ten boats to be distributed along the seaboard as follows: two for the coast of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, one for Long Island Sound, one for New York, one for the Bay of Delaware, two for the Chesapeake and neighboring waters, and one each for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. They were to measure from thirty-six to forty feet in length of keel, at an estimated cost of \$1000 each, manned by two officers and six marines, and armed with swivels. Congress appropriated \$23,327 50 to support ten equipped cutters, with 10 masters, 30 mates, 40 mariners, and 20 boys.

This was the original plant, an unpretending fleet of small, sharp-built, single masted, light-draught sailing vessels; in fact they were not much larger than yawls of the present day. The officers and crews, besides receiving regular pay, were entitled to a proportion of the amounts derived from fines, penalties, and forfeitures that were collected in case of seizures, and for violations of the navigation and customs laws. This prize-money, as it was termed, was in later years abolished, and an increased compensation voted the officers. By degrees, and as occasion arose, the service was augmented in strength and armament, frequently acting in concert with the naval branch. The comparatively meagre commercial relations of the country, with a thinly populated and unsettled sea-coast, did not require at that time a large force for the protection of the revenue; but with the rapid growth of foreign trade, and a shipping interest that was constantly developing at home, the necessity for a cordon of capable and swift cruisers became manifest. An act of Congress of 1799 gave authority to the President to maintain as many revenue cutters as should be necessary to provide for the proper collection of import and tonnage duties, the expenses whereof should be paid out of such sum as should be annually appropriated therefor.



Thus the corps gradually grew in size and importance; its vessels became larger and better. In addition to the usual duties, they suppressed piracy, that had become common on account of the many adventurers attracted to American waters. A distinctive revenue ensign and pennant were also provided by law, the former consisting of sixteen vertical alternate red and white stripes, and a union containing a blue eagle on a white ground surmounted by thirteen blue stars.

Revenue-cutters have participated in all wars of the United States except the Algerine war. While action of the service in the nations defence has not been separately chronicled in history, its work has always been timely and efficient, and its record honorable. In 1797 its vessels, owing to the belligerent attitude of France, were placed on a strict war footing, and during the troublous times that followed that year were unceasing and effective agents in co-operation with the navy in maintaining the dignity and position of the government. On the cessation of hostilities the cutters resumed their functions under the Treasury Department.

In 1798 a number were employed cruising in the waters of the West Indies. The embargo act of 1807, intended to countervail Napoleons decrees, brought the service into special requisition in guarding the seaboard and arresting the departure of unauthorized merchant ships. In the war of 1812 its force was actively employed in repelling foreign invasion: vessels were despatched on hazardous missions, and charged with perilous and difficult duty, and were frequently in the thick of action. To the cutter Jefferson, William Ham, master, is due the credit of the first marine capture of the conflict, that of the British schooner Patriot, with a valuable cargo of sugars, while on her way from Guadeloupe to Halifax, June 25, 1812, just seven days after the proclamation of war. Many deeds of daring and bravery were displayed by officers and crews.

In 1813 the revenue-cutter Vigilant, Captain Cahoon, captured the British privateer Dart, off Newport, after a decisive struggle, in which a number of the assailants were wounded, and several privateersmen, including the first officer, were killed. The cutters Madison and Gallatin also made important prizes of three brigs on the Southern coast, laden with ammunition and supplies, and carried them into Charleston and Savannah. During the nullification troubles of 1832 several revenue-cutters were stationed off Charleston, prepared to enforce the execution of the tariff laws. At the time of the Seminole war they transported troops and munitions, and afforded protection to settlers along the coast. In the war with Mexico eight vessels were ordered to proceed to the theatre of operations, where they participated at the naval attacks on Alvarado and Tabasco, and worked in unison with the naval squadron. The revenue steamer McLane and the schooner Forward, manning six guns each, were a part of the expedition under Commodore M. C. Perry, against the latter port and Frontera, October, 1846. During the war of the rebellion the cutters were actively concerned conveying despatches, pursuing blockade-runners, doing guard and reconnoissance duty, watching Confederate batteries, and sharing in numerous engagements, a number of which resulted in the loss of officers and men.

The Revenue Marine at the present time has a complement of 40 vessels, 14 of which are sloops, steam launches, and harbor boats, 1 a sailing bark, and the remaining 25 steamers ranging from 130 to 500 tons burden. The Bear, noted for the part taken in the Greely relief expedition, which was recently transferred to this service, is slightly in excess of the tonnage mentioned.

In 1843 steamers were first introduced, and by gradual steps were substituted for the old top-sail schooner type of craft then in use (a relic of the days of privateering), until now but one sailing cutter is left. The first screw propellers were the Legare and Spencer; these proved failures, and soon went out of use. The sidewheel steamer Harriet Lane, christened after the accomplished niece of President Buchanan, was among those first built. Her career was a notable one. She took part in the naval expedition to Paraguay, and in the late war was several times under fire. Most of the fleet are stanch, fast, thorough sea-going vessels, of good manageable qualities in rough weather, and equipped for almost any emergency likely to arise. The greater number of them have been constructed under the immediate supervision of officers of the corps, and have been devised with special reference to the wants of the several stations, and many are considered admirable models of their size and type. They are usually armed with from two to four breech-loading rifled cannon, and provided with necessary small-arms for the use of crews.

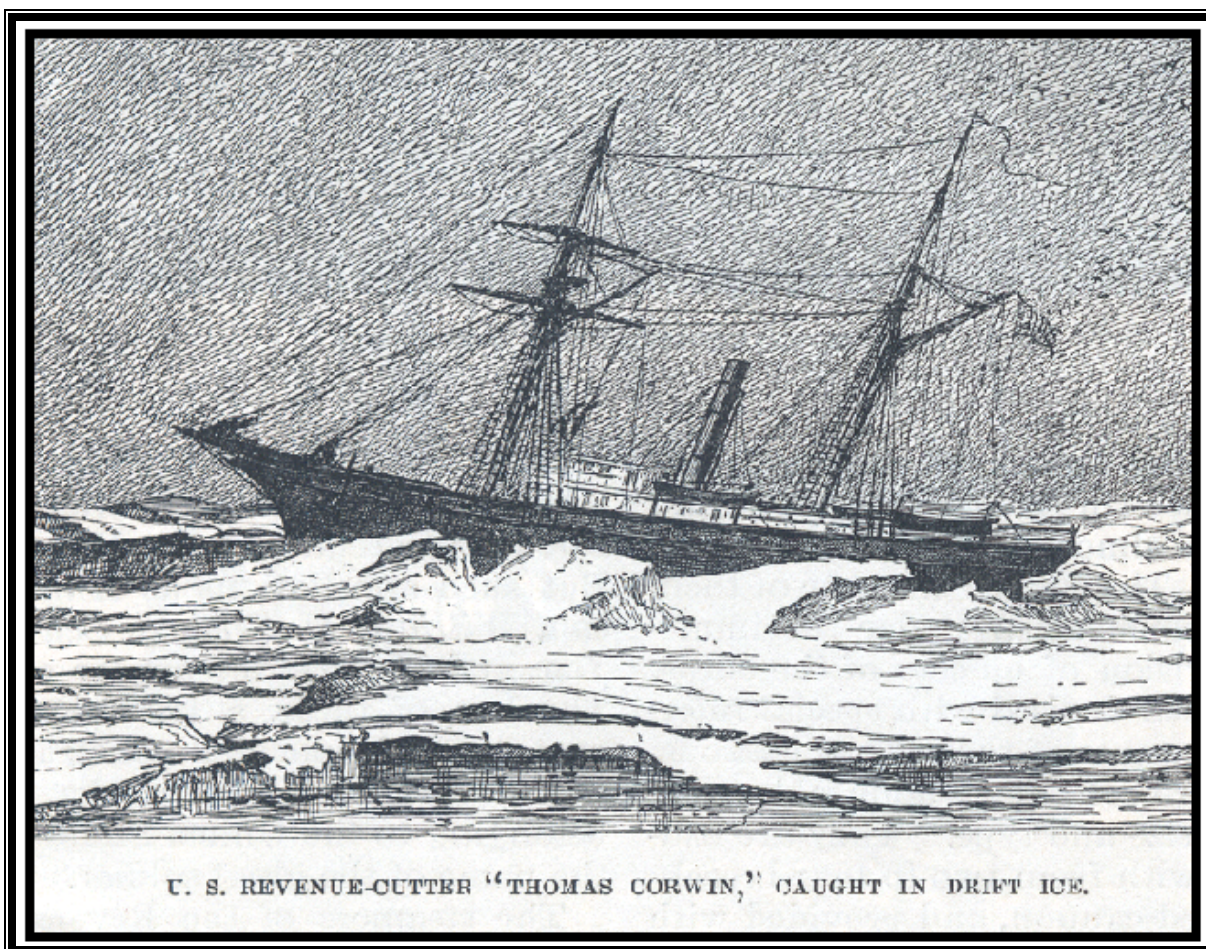
The Commodore Perry, one of the handsomest and swiftest cutters in the service, cruising on Lake Erie, made an average speed of nineteen miles an hour on her trial trip. It is believed that this result has not been exceeded by any government vessel. It has been the practice in late years to name the vessels after former Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries of the Treasury. Thus four of the cutters shown in our illustrations are named respectively after Albert Gallatin (Secretary of the Treasury 1801 ~ 09) Levi Woodbury (1834 ~ 41) George M. Bibb (1844); and Thomas Corwin (1850-53); while another is named after James C. Dobbin (Secretary of the Navy 1853 ~ 57). But such appellations as Andrew Johnson, William H. Seward, Schuyler Colfax, and U. S. Grant appear on the list. The last of these, a bark-rigged steam-propeller of splendid construction, stationed at New York, is the only ship belonging to the United States that bears the name of the great soldier.

The steamers of the Revenue Marine are, as a general rule, ready at a moments call to proceed upon prolonged and important missions; as has been stated, they have been among the first armed force to repel a foreign enemy, or aid in the prevention or settlement of international complications. In less than ten days after the ratification of the treaty (1867) for the purchase of Alaska, the revenue steamer Lincoln, under command of Captain John W. White, was despatched to that region, and much information was obtained regarding the geography, resources, productions, climate, etc., of the country. This cruise has been followed yearly by the cruising of revenue vessels in the waters of Alaska, and up to the present time no vessel of the service has met with disaster while engaged in such arduous work. As this article is being prepared, word comes from the Pacific coast that the whaling bark Amethyst is supposed to have been cast away in Behring Sea. In the short space of five days from the reception of the first tidings, the revenue-cutter Richard Rush, by order of the Secretary of the Treasury, started from San Francisco, in the midst of winter, on a 4000-mile voyage to the polar ocean, in search of the crew of the missing ship.

A vessel that has gained a distinctive public reputation for her various expeditions to the arctic is the steam-cutter Thomas Corwin. She sailed from San Francisco May 4, 1881, destined for Alaska and the northwest polar sea. The object of the cruise was, in addition to revenue duty, to ascertain the fate of two missing whalers (Mount Wollaston and Vigilant), and to communicate, if possible, with the exploring steamer Jeannette.

During the previous year five ineffectual attempts were made by the Corwin to reach Herald Island. On this trip a landing was made, after a hazardous run through the drift ice, and Wrangel Land was at the same time sighted to the westward. To convey a partial idea of the perilous nature of navigating the waters (or rather the ice) of the arctic, the following incident, taken from the report of Captain Hooper, affords a graphic illustration:

The wind had increased to a moderate gale, and the snow fell so thick that observation beyond the length of the vessel was impossible. Shortly after midnight we found ourselves entirely surrounded by heavy ice, and were compelled to use the engine to work out of it in doing so the rudder was broken and unshipped, every pintle being carried away. The situation was anything but pleasant, caught in the end of a rapidly closing lead, 120 miles from open water, in a howling gale and driving snow-storm, and without a rudder. It at first appeared as if the destruction of the vessel was inevitable. However, after several hours of hard work, steering as best we could by means of the sails, and giving the vessel a great many hard bumps and nips, we succeeded in getting into the open lead again, and by six o'clock we had prepared a jury-rudder.



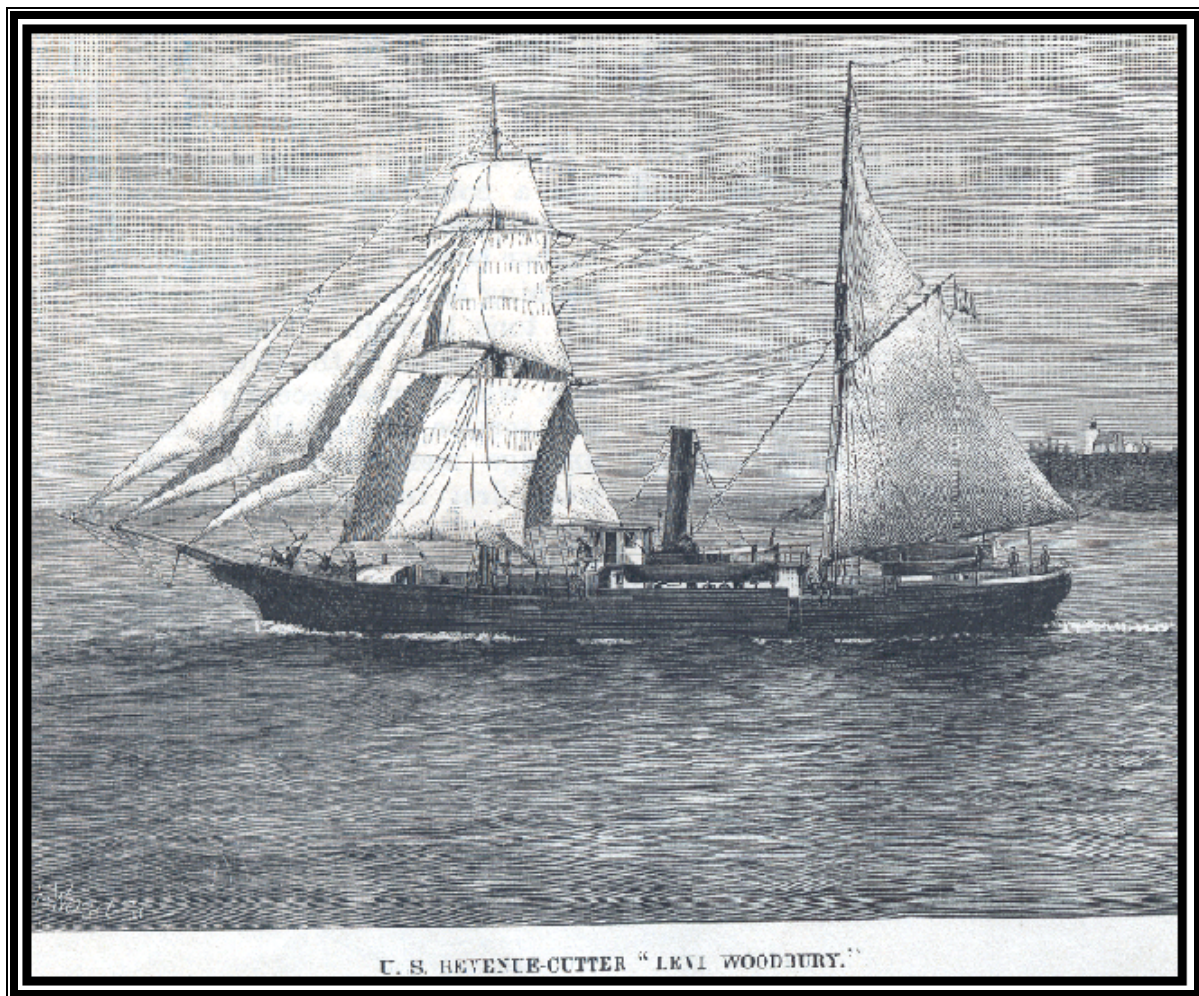
One of the most eventful features of the cruise was the first landing on Wrangel Land (north latitude 71~04), August 12. After much difficulty in pushing the Corwin through the floating and grounded masses of ice, an open space was reached a short distance from the island, where the vessel was anchored, and a party succeeded in getting on shore in a small boat. Lieutenant W. E. Reynolds, of the party (which included Captain Hooper, Dr. I. C. Rosse, Assistant Engineer F. E. Owen, Mr. John Muir, Mr. E.W. Nelson, of the Signal Service, and the boats crew), planted the United States flag on a cliff, where were secured a copy of the New York Herald and a record of the Corwin's cruise, and possession was formally taken of the newly acquired ice clad territory amid enthusiastic cheers and a salute from the guns of the cutter. In an extract from the Bulletin of the American Geographical Society (No. 3, 1883), Dr. Rosse says, regarding the first landing on Wrangel Island: It may be remarked with pardonable pride that the acquisition of this remote island, though of no political or commercial value, will serve the higher and nobler purpose of a perpetual reminder of American enterprise, courage, and maritime skill.

During the cruises of the Corwin in 1880, 81, which covered 12,000 miles, valuable surveys and soundings and interesting meteorological observations were made, and much data collected relative to the currents and natural features of the country, while special attention was given to the physical characteristics of the natives and the diseases prevalent among them. Important coal deposits were discovered and located; information was gathered concerning the lost whalers, and the fate of one determined; regular duty was performed in preventing unlawful incursions upon the sealing interests, and a number of predatory vessels were seized engaged in illicit traffic. A brief mention of four succeeding cruises (1882, 3, 4, 5) of the Corwin to Alaska, in command of Captain M. A. Healy, will prove of interest, the first being made to St. Lawrence Bay, Siberia, to bring away the people of the burned naval relief steamer Rodgers, which went north in the spring of 1881 in search of the Jeannette. The Corwin made a second cruise the same year to protect the seal fisheries. Various explorations were also made into the interior of Alaska, and a serious outbreak of the natives on the mainland quelled.

During the last two cruises of the Corwin much valuable assistance was rendered to shipwrecked sailors and destitute miners, fifty-nine persons, without means of transportation, being brought away at one time. Under the vigilant cruising of revenue vessels in Alaskan waters the unscrupulous selling to the natives of fire-arms and spirits, by masters and owners of lawless trading crafts, has greatly diminished. Owing to the fact that the Corwin is too limited in coal-carrying capacity, and is, in other essential details, unadapted to the rigors of arctic cruising, she will in future be replaced by the revenue steamer Bear, of larger dimensions and stronger build.

The Revenue Marine, while being a part of the Treasury organization, has always been regarded as belonging to the military force of the government. While aiding the civil establishment in the enforcement of certain laws, it can, at the pleasure of the President, be accounted as part of the navy. Congress has conferred naval rank and authority upon the officers, who are appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and hold their commissions during good behavior. The Secretary of the Treasury is entrusted with the immediate control and management of the service, as well as the stationing of vessels and officers.

He determines the number of petty officers and seamen, and designates the Collector of Customs under whose supervision each vessel is placed. Subordinate to him are the Chief and Assistant Chief of the Revenue Marine Division, occupied respectively by Mr. Peter Bonnett and Mr. W. S. Eaton. In 1883 a proposition was made to transfer the administration of this arm to the Navy Department, and make of it a special naval corps. A bill incorporating such a scheme was introduced in Congress, and was strongly recommended and advocated by the Secretary of the Navy, and as strenuously opposed by officers of the Treasury, but the measure never left the committee - room where it was referred. Among most European powers similar services are in charge of officers detailed from the navy, who co-operate with the custom-house officials in the discharge of their duties.



The personnel of the Revenue Marine consists of five grades of the line and three grades of engineers, namely, 36 captains, 36 first lieutenants, 36 second lieutenants, 36 third lieutenants and cadets; and 25 chief engineers, 20 first assistant engineers, 27 second assistant engineers; and, in addition, about 800 men. Officers are required to be proficient in the knowledge of gunnery and military drills, and to instruct and exercise the crews in the use of great guns, rifles, carbines, pistols, cutlasses, etc. The discipline maintained on revenue-cutters is that usually prevailing on a man-of-war. A knowledge of the multifarious questions contained in the customs and navigation laws, and other statutory provisions bearing upon the duties committed to the service, as well as a familiarity with the regulations affecting the maritime interests of the country, is essential to a skilled revenue officer. A long period of application and experience is necessary to acquire this knowledge. He must, besides, give considerate attention and study to many other professional matters. His tour of duty on a particular station is regulated by the exigencies of the service, but is usually limited to a term of three years. Promotions are governed by written competitive examinations, from three to five of the senior officers of a lower grade being designated to compete for a vacancy that occurs, by resignation or casualty, in a higher grade. The engineer staff was organized about 1844, soon after the introduction of steam into revenue vessels as a propelling power. Second assistant engineers are appointed from civil life after undergoing a searching technical examination; the method of subsequent advancement is similar to that employed for deck officers.

Formerly candidates were admitted to the grade of third lieutenant after undergoing an examination which was required to give competent proof of proficiency and skill in navigation and seamanship. By this plan a great many capable persons entered the lists from the merchant marine and volunteer navy. The names of two officers are borne on the register (Captain Louis N. Stodder and Lieutenant Samuel Howard) who were a part of the force on the Monitor during its notable fight with the Merrimac in Hampton Roads. The former was also on board of the Monitor when she sank off Cape Hatteras, and was among the few saved. In July, 1876, Congress adopted a measure to appoint cadets to fill vacancies which occurred in the line.

The text of the law is as follows: That hereafter, upon the occurring of a vacancy in the grade of third lieutenant in the Revenue Marine Service, the Secretary of the Treasury may appoint a cadet, not less than eighteen nor more than twenty-five years of age, with rank next below that of third lieutenant, whose pay shall be three ~ fourths that of a third Lieutenant, and he shall not be appointed to a higher grade till he shall have served a satisfactory probationary term of two years, and passed the examination required by the regulations of said service; and upon the promotion of such cadet another may be appointed in his stead, but the whole number of third lieutenants and cadets shall at no time exceed the number of third lieutenants now authorized by law. The object of this bill is to educate young men for officers. Any individual of the above qualifications who can furnish satisfactory evidence of good moral character, correct habits, and who meets the requirements of the regulations as to physical soundness and conditions, can compete in the examinations that take place annually at the Treasury Department to fill vacancies. Appointments are not influenced by political considerations or favoritism, but are made strictly on the score of merit. It is now in contemplation to require applicants to have a further qualification of eighteen months practical sea service.

The subjects embraced in the initial examination include the whole of arithmetic; algebra to equations of the second degree; English grammar; the history of the United States; geography, reading, writing, spelling, and composition. The minimum standard of eligibility is fixed at 75 out of a possible 100. In orthography a separate standard is fixed: thirty words are usually given, and a failure to spell twenty of them correctly is considered a bar to appointment. The qualifications are more exacting than for admission to the Naval Academy, and a class is formed from those evincing the highest degree of aptitude.

He is then instructed to report on board the revenue bark Salmon P. Chase, stationed at New Bedford, Massachusetts, where the members are allowed a few days to prepare themselves for sea and get accustomed to ships routine. The cadet school-ship is a bark about 154 tons burden, with a length between perpendiculars of 106 feet, and a breadth of beam of 25 feet. She was built in Philadelphia in 1878 expressly for this service, and is designed and equipped for the training and accommodation of cadets. She carries a battery of four broadside guns. The steerage, or apartment in which the cadets live, contains six staterooms, with two berths each, wash-stand, and lockers sufficient for clothing. At present there are two classes under instruction, designated as senior and junior, and since the organization of the system seven classes have been graduated, consisting of a total membership of thirty-one, and commissioned as third lieutenants. The classes vary in number from year to year, in accordance with existing vacancies, the largest thus far containing eleven members, and the smallest three. The port routine is made up of daily application and recitation in the academical branches; physical exercises, which include simple athletics, rowing, and going aloft; and professional studies and drills in navigation, seamanship, gunnery, signaling, etc., either practical or theoretical, as the temper of the weather permits.

Certain hours are provided by the internal regulations of the ship for recreation, and only on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and on Sunday after muster and inspection, are the cadets granted liberty on shore, except by special approval of the commanding officer. They mess among themselves, and elect their own caterer, and while under instruction are required to wear a prescribed uniform. The use of tobacco and intoxicating beverages, in any form, is prohibited. A list of demerit marks is in force for breaches of discipline or violations of the rules, and careful records are kept of the standing of each cadet in his studies and deportment, and submitted to the department, which, with his examination averages, determine his relative rank in his class after the graduating ceremonies at Washington at the end of the course.

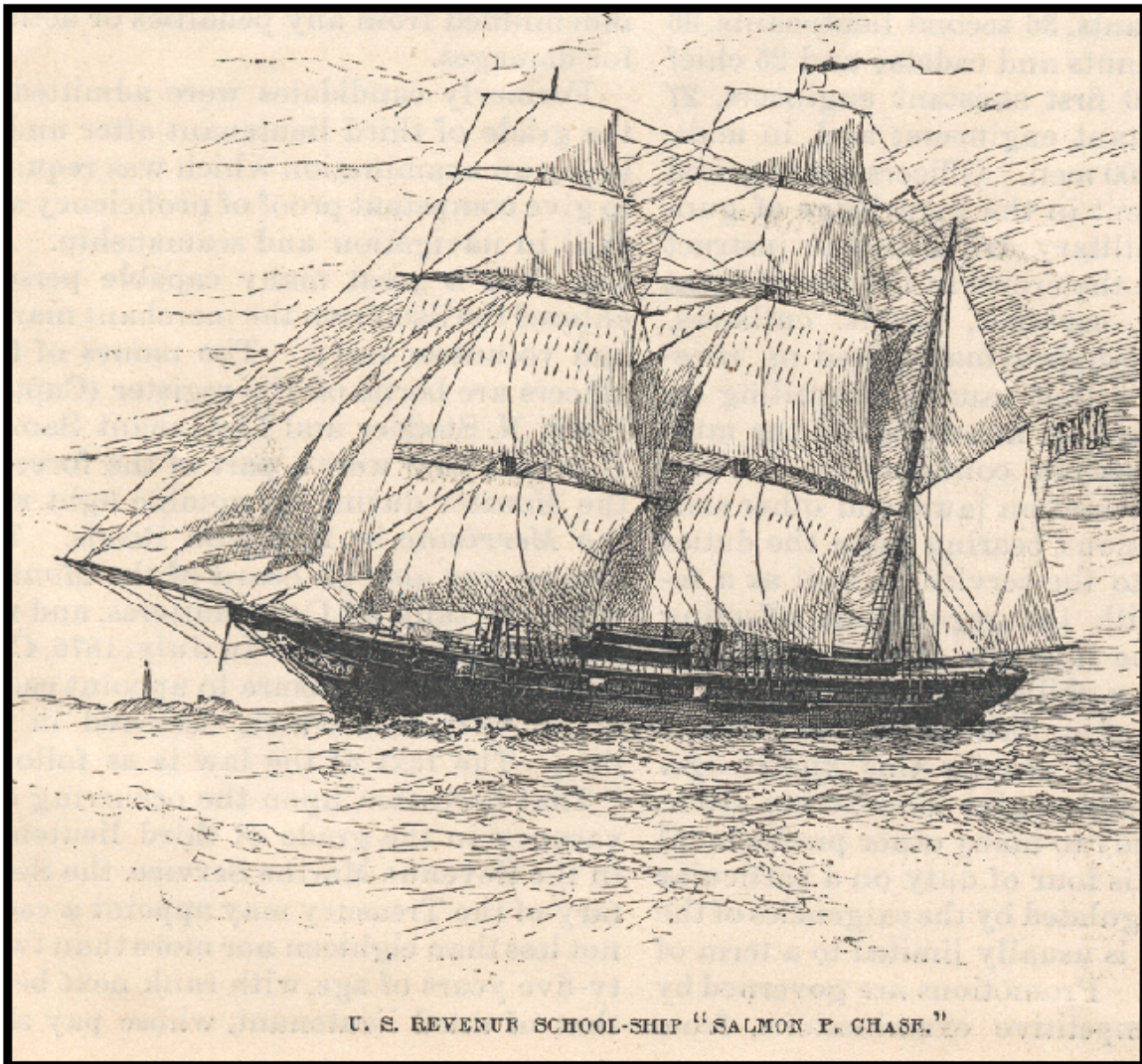
The last-named consists of two years (subject to an additional year), and is divided into four terms, each year embracing two terms, as follows: from June to January, which includes the practice cruise at sea of the three summer months, and a weeks vacation during the Christmas holidays; and from January to June. In the latter parts of December and May occur the semiannual and annual examinations respectively, which contain the summary of questions and exercises covering the subjects that have previously been pursued.



The academic course is under the charge of Mr. Edwin Emery, a graduate of Bowdoin College, and for a long time a teacher and principal in public schools. It takes up arithmetic, algebra, geometry, astronomy, and trigonometry (plain and spherical); the history of the origin and growth of the English language; composition, rhetoric, and correspondence, in which the cadets are required to write upon abstract, imaginary, descriptive, and professional subjects, and to construct official letters, reports, and forms; philosophy and steam-engineering, the latter being treated both practically and theoretically, and supplemented by lectures of Consulting Engineer Charles E. Emery, Ph.D., of New York;

history of the world in general, and of the United States in particular; that part of international law which deals with the rights of nations in peace and war, rights of jurisdiction over the sea, and of commerce; embargoes, law of contraband, blockade, right of search, offences against the law of nations, piracy, etc.

In constitutional law the history of the Constitution is taught, and the legislative, executive, and judicial departments, and powers of Congress, are discussed, while the revenue law comprehends all that relates to the duties of an officer of the customs, such as the regulations of commerce and navigation, collection districts, and ships papers.



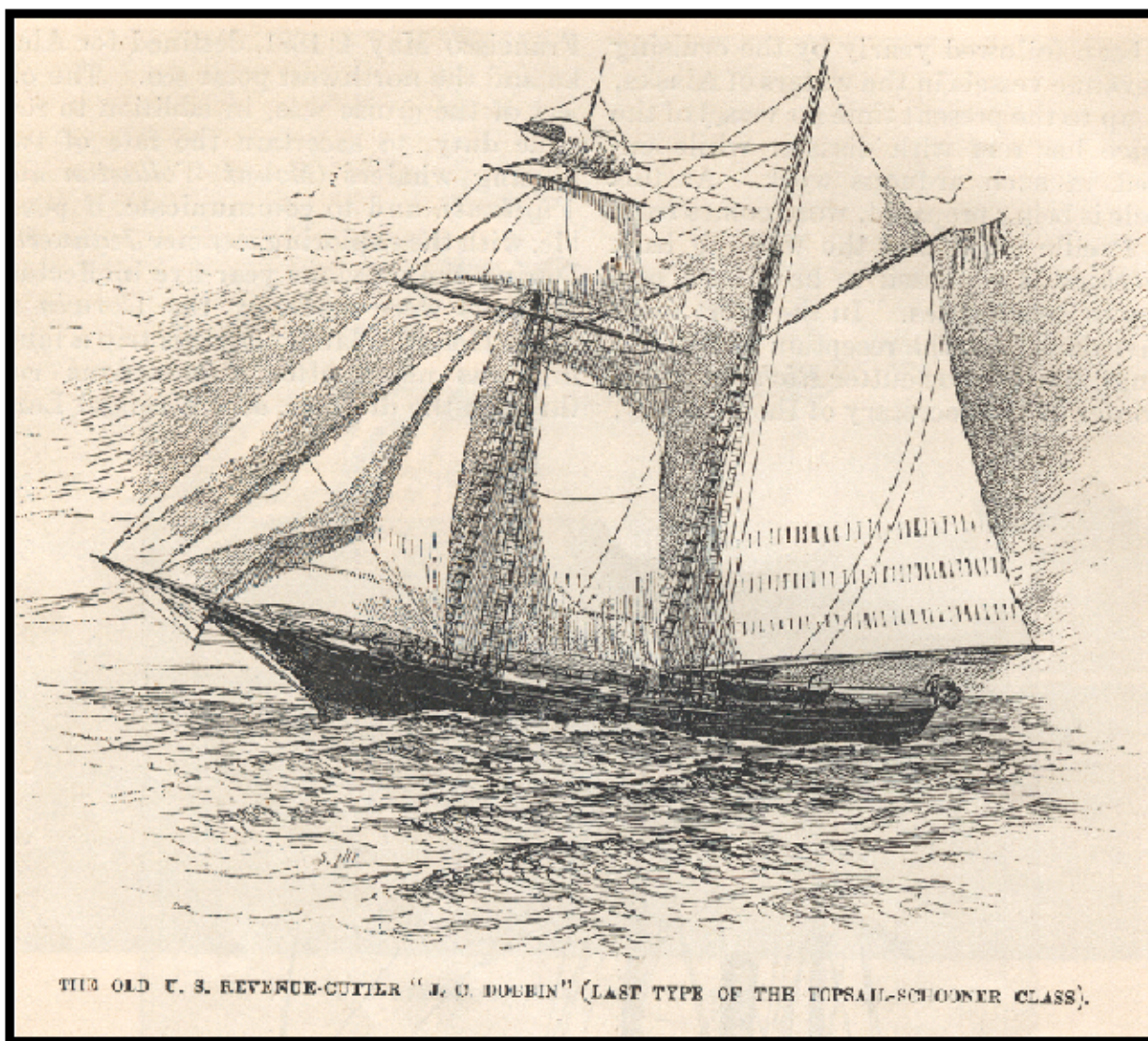
About the 1st of June the Chase puts to sea, with four officers, a surgeon, two classes of cadets, and a crew of thirty men. She is provisioned, stored, and fitted for a three months cruise. Here is where the test of a young mans endurance, pluck, and energy commences, as he is subjected to many of the inconveniences and discomforts incident to a sea-voyage, at the same time having to perform all the duties belonging to the vocation of a sailor.

He has a taste of the sternest and most trying obligations at the threshold of his undertaking, which results in a pretty thorough test of his metal, and if any one is actually unfit for the sea, physically or otherwise, the fact is at once brought to the surface, and gives him an opportunity to turn back at the beginning of a career in which he would not be likely to succeed. The cadets are arranged into watches, and in this capacity they are under the instruction of the officer of the deck, and are required to write up the remarks in the rough log, to observe carefully the making and taking in of all sail, to study the various evolutions of the vessel, transmitting and giving commands when directed, and, after reaching a certain degree of proficiency, they are exercised in charge of the deck, and in working ship in the important operations of tacking and wearing. The object is to impress them with the duties and responsibilities of deck officers, and the strictest obedience to every detail is enforced. Knotting, splicing, making mats, and learning the nomenclature of the different parts of the hull and spars, and the names and uses of ropes and sails, are among the first lessons in seamanship, and during periods of calm weather the rigging is reset and rattled down. The cadets are given constant practice in raising shears, stepping masts, reefing, furling, and shifting sails, and in sending up and down yards. Each takes his trick at the wheel, and acquaints himself with the mysteries of the compass and the steering gear. The marlinespike, slush and tar pots, are the insignia of a thorough-going salt, and the young man who has never immersed his hands in the resinous substance finds ample opportunity on a practice cruise.

In navigation the cadets are exercised in taking altitudes with the sextant, of the sun, moon, planets, and stars. They are required to determine daily the latitude and longitude of the vessel, and establish the ship's position by dead-reckoning and by the different sailing problems. The variation, deviation, and error of the compass is ascertained; in port, artificial horizon sights are used to discover the error of chronometer. The classes are educated in the international and general service signal codes, the latter usually being practiced on shore, the cadets receiving and transmitting messages by a system of flag movements. The use of small-arms and broadswords is comprised in the port routine, the cadets being drilled in military marches and tactics, target-shooting, etc. The gunnery exercises consist in the distribution of officers and men at general quarters. The cadets are trained in the working of all classes of broadside and pivot guns, and are familiarized with the duties and stations of officers of divisions; they are taught the construction of magazines, the uses of fuses and projectiles, and the nature and properties of powder and combustibles; are stationed at fire quarters and at the boats, and in case of an alarm at sea are required to act promptly in the discharge of their several duties.

On the practice cruises the Chase usually touches at some foreign port for supplies and mail, having been on different occasions to England, France, Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, the Azores and Bermuda islands. She returns to the American coast in August, and devotes the latter portion of the cruise to active nautical evolutions in the bays and harbors.

Captain John A. Henriques was the first officer who had general charge of the school, being identified with it for about six years. The system owes much of its success to his excellent management. At present the Chase is commanded by Captain Leonard G. Shepard, an able and efficient officer. It may be pertinent to remark that the saving between the compensation of third lieutenants and cadets, and the annual saving through salaries held in abeyance, accruing from the vacancies in the former grade, is sufficient to defray the entire expense of instructing the cadets from year to year.



Under the law passed by Congress in 1878, provision was made for the detail of Revenue Marine officers for duty in connection with the Life-saving Service, as inspectors and assistant inspectors. Their extended experience as coast navigators ably fitted them for this special branch of work. In each district an officer is stationed whose province it is to see that the equipments of the stations are in proper condition, and the crews regularly drilled in the use of life-saving apparatus.

A number of important implements that have been added to the approved appliances for rescuing life from wrecks have been the inventions of revenue officers. Captains James H. Merryman (also chief inspector) and George W. Moore are superintendents of construction in New York, and supervise all building and repairs, and the purchase of supplies for new stations.

The marked success which has attended the operations of this corps has been greatly enhanced by the assistance rendered by the Revenue Marine, its vessels cruising an average of 15,000 miles yearly on lifesaving duty. Mr. S. I. Kimball, the General Superintendent, to whose persistent and untiring efforts the service owes its present standard of excellence, in his report of 1882, in flattering testimony of the foregoing, had occasion to say, Little wonder why the Life-saving Service has succeeded; the souls of such men have entered it, and it has become an incarnation. In a highly eulogistic letter recently received by Mr. Kimball from Admiral J. R. Ward, ex-Manager of the Royal National Life-boat Institution of Great Britain, the latter concedes the United States service to be the best and most perfect in the world.

The jurisdiction of the customs authority is confined within a limit extending four leagues from the coast. Vessels arriving in United States waters are boarded and examined, their papers certified to, and proper fastenings, if deemed necessary, affixed to the hatches communicating with the holds. This work is often accompanied with much difficulty and danger, as any mishap in lowering a boat in a heavy sea, or a want of skilful management in going alongside of a ship under way, might occasion disaster and loss of life. Whenever a vessel liable to seizure or examination does not bring to when required to do so, the commander of a cutter, after the discharge of a cautionary gun, can fire into such vessel, and all persons acting under his orders are indemnified from any penalties or actions for damages.

The Revenue Marine is required by law or regulation to aid in enforcing nearly every statute bearing upon the maritime interests of the country. Its primary work consists in protecting the revenue against smuggling, though the effectiveness of revenue vessels in accomplishing this end is not always apparent, their strict surveillance of the coast having long since broken up smuggling by cargo; but whenever an exigency has required the withdrawal of a vessel from her cruising grounds for any considerable time, the unlawful practice has generally been resumed, with prosperous results to those engaged, until the return of the cutter to the field of depredation, when the illicit vocation would naturally cease. A glance at the numerous duties devolving upon the service will show the magnitude and variety of the work committed to its enforcement.

Among these are:

The neutrality laws (to see that they are not violated or evaded); those in suppression of piracy and robbery on the high seas; those in aid of the quarantine system of the various States; those for protecting the timber reserves of the United States against marauding parties; those for the prevention of unlawful traffic in rum and fire-arms in Alaska, and for the preservation of the seal fisheries; those regulating the navigation in our waters of domestic and foreign vessels, including the license, enrollment, and registry of vessels; those that prohibit the overlading of passenger steamers, and require the necessary life-saving appliances, as boats and life-preservers, to be kept on board merchant ships; that requiring lights to be exhibited at night on merchant vessels; those providing for the name, hailing port, tonnage, and official numbers to be properly affixed; the regulations requiring steamers to carry the necessary evidence of inspection to hulls and machinery, and that the officers are fitly licensed.

The revenue forces suppress mutinies upon vessels of the merchant marine, and form an efficient means in harbors to save shipping from conflagration; they are, under the law, an important part of the Life-saving Corps; they report upon the absence of buoys and lights upon the sea-coast, and they carry out the humane enactments of Congress by actively cruising in the winter season in aid of distressed mariners. Besides these regular duties there are numerous others to which they are detailed from time to time, such as aiding the Lighthouse Establishment, the Coast Survey, the Fish Commissioner, the ocean telegraph lines, as well as all scientific enterprises coming within the scope of their operations.

For several years the Revenue Marine has been a useful factor in cooperating with the Marine Hospital Service and the civil authorities in confining and alleviating the yellow-fever, cholera, and smallpox epidemics that have at different times made their appearance on our shores. This service has been accomplished by carrying physicians, nurses, medicines, and supplies to those afflicted, and by assisting in the maintenance of a rigid national quarantine at various points. From December to April of each year, during the dangerous and inclement season, the President directs the cutters (under the law of 1837) to cruise vigorously on their stations to afford aid to vessels in distress. Those detailed for this duty are provided with supplies, including extra provisions for the shipwrecked, and are instructed to extend to all requiring relief such assistance as may be adapted to their condition and necessities. By the terms of their orders they are not to put into port unless compelled to do so by stress of weather or other unavoidable circumstances. The revenue-cutters stationed on the Great Lakes are, during the period of open navigation, particularly charged with similar important work.

The performance of this duty entails untiring vigilance and activity, subjecting the cutters and crews to the keenest exposure, and oftentimes to the utmost danger. Relief is given to hundreds of imperilled vessels each season, in one way or another, either by towing helpless and disabled craft to harbors of safety, hauling others off reefs and shoals, keeping channels clear of ice and removing obstructions, or by giving succor and aid to shipwrecked mariners. No more fitting illustration can be given of the great good that has been effected in this respect than the timely and incalculable services of the revenue steamer Dexter, rendered in connection with one of the most awful marine catastrophes of modern times. The details, even at this late day, are fresh in the minds of many people. Few events have ever occurred that excited so much profound and wide-spread horror public interest, and sympathy. On Thursday afternoon, January 17, 1884, the 2000-ton steamer City of Columbus, of the Boston and Savannah line, left Boston for the port of Savannah, with 81 passengers and a ships company of 45 persons. She was a staunch, iron - built vessel, thoroughly equipped for sea, commanded by Captain S. E. Wright, an old and experienced seaman, and up to this voyage a successful commander. Many of the passengers were invalids seeking to restore lost health in Southern climes. The wind had increased to a fitful hurricane in the night, a heavy and irregular sea was running, and the weather was crisp and cold. The steamer was standing on her usual course through Vineyard Sound, and had passed nearly all the dangerous points which lie thick in those waters, and in a few moments would have reached the open ocean. Unfortunately, at a critical time, the captain left his post of duty and went below, giving directions to the helmsman how to steer. Three-quarters of an hour afterward, between three and four o'clock of the morning of the 18th, the City of Columbus struck hard and fast upon Devils Bridge, a rugged reef that juts out five-eighths of a mile from Gay Head promontory, and which is plainly marked on all charts.

No tongue can depict the awful terror of the situation: darkness prevailed. the wind howled and the sea roared, and a hundred human beings were swept into the icy waves and perished. Those who could, took refuge in the rigging, and many who were exhausted and benumbed by the cold dropped into the lashing waters. The boats that were cleared away were either dashed to pieces or swamped.

Soon after daylight the revenue-cutter Dexter, cruising in the vicinity, arrived on the scene. Captain Eric Gabrielson, her commander, at once sent out two boats in charge of Lieutenants Rhodes and Kennedy; thirteen men were rescued, all of whom were forced to jump from the rigging into the sea, and were picked up as they rose to the surface. Two trips to the wreck in the small boats, on the top of a boisterous sea, were a most hazardous undertaking, and required unflinching courage. An equal number of survivors, as well as many lifeless bodies, were transferred to the decks of the Dexter through the praiseworthy and intrepid efforts of the Gay Head Indians, who manned the first life-boat that went to the scene of disaster. One hundred and two souls were lost in this dreadful calamity. It was during these hours of lire-saving work that Lieutenant John U. Rhodes performed an act of unrivalled heroism which made him famous. Two men hung in the rigging, unable to move on account of exhaustion, and were the only persons remaining on the ill-fated vessel. The latter could not be boarded without great peril, and Rhodes tried to swim through the freezing surf to the steamer. In his first endeavor he was struck by a piece of floating timber, and had to abandon the attempt. Although bruised, he insisted on making another trial, and succeeded in removing tile helpless, half-frozen creatures, both of whom died after reaching a place of safety. The Legislature of Connecticut, his native State, unanimously passed a resolution thanking him for his gallant conduct, and he received the gold medal of the Massachusetts Humane Society for heroic exertions, at the imminent peril of his own life, in rescuing two persons from the steamer City of Columbus, besides many other medals and testimonials from various sources. Captain Gabrielson also received the Society's medal, and the officers in general were awarded certificates for humane efforts, etc., while each of the crew received a money reward. Joint resolutions were presented iii Congress giving the thanks of that body to the officers and crew of the Dexter. The Secretary of the Treasury made the matter the subject of a congratulatory circular, bestowing warm praise on those concerned, and urging emulation on the part of others, which was read in the presence of officers and men throughout the service, and the President directed that Lieutenant Rhodes be advanced twenty one files in the line of promotion.

The following table exhibits, as well as such figures can, the work of the Revenue Marine, and the expense of maintaining it, for the past five years:

Year ended.	Number of miles cruised	Vessels boarded & examined	Vessels seized or reported for violation of law	Number of persons picked out of the water & saved from drowning	Number of vessels assisted in distress	Value of vessels and their cargo, to which assistance was rendered	Annual cost of maintaining the service
June 30, 1881	282,027	29,101	3,163	141	148	\$2,766,882	\$846,791
June 30. 1882	303,562	24,008	1,042	111	147	\$2,254,716	\$846,423
June 30, 1883	300,880	25,587	2,240	60	224	\$4,885,175	\$853,553
June 30. 1884	317,843	26,282	2,270	63	246	\$7,015,572	\$851,311
June 30, 1885	312,569	24,481	1,425	60	274	\$5,568,043	\$819,897
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Aver. per year	303,376	25,892	2,028	87	208	\$4,498,078	\$843,595

The fines and penalties incurred by vessels violating the law average per year, in round numbers, about \$645,000, or more than three-fourths of the entire cost of conducting the service.

The average number of persons on board vessels assisted each year, irrespective of those actually saved from drowning, was 2,783.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the estimated value of property assisted, in the brief period of five years, reaches the aggregate of \$22,490,388. In a single year the value of assistance was over eight times the annual public outlay. The business of revenue-cutters brings them principally into the waters along the coast, thus subjecting them always to dangers of navigation far greater than are encountered in mid-ocean. By such exceptional experience their officers become trained and skilled in coastwise cruising. Within the past ten years the vessels of the service have sailed an aggregate of two million and a half miles, combating every condition of wind and weather, and during that period no accident of moment has happened to any of them. The Revenue Marine holds a well earned popularity among those engaged in conducting the floating commerce of the country, and among the public generally, and is recognized as increasing the receipt of the Treasury, and saving to the shipping interests of the nation each year many times the cost of its maintenance.



Worth G. Ross
First Captain Commandant , U.S. Revenue Cutter Service
1905 - 1911

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES REVENUE MARINE SERVICE
 BY LIEUTENANT WORTH G. ROSS, U.S.R.M.

